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Time and Place

THE TIME WAS THE EARLY 1930s, the place the southeastern states, the setting the Great Depression. Minor shifts in time, place and scene occurred within those years. In the background of place was growing up in Arkansas and moving from there to Georgia in 1928. More important, this was a move from country to city, to Atlanta. Along with that move came a change of the parental base to Oxford, Georgia, which served to keep one foot in the soil as well as one in the city. The next major move was to Chapel Hill in 1934. In the meantime came two summer excursions in Europe, a year of study at Columbia University in 1931–1932, and two years of teaching at Georgia Tech.

The setting or scene, of course, embraced much more than the Great Depression, as large as that loomed. For the college graduate, class of 1930, in the process of discovering his mind and identity, the most exciting scene was intellectual—the high and most creative years of the Southern Literary Renaissance in fiction, poetry and drama. Down underneath that, too low down to be acknowledged by a young cultural snob, stirred creative explosions in music—the continuous rebirth of jazz. Black in origin, and vulgar as well, jazz was relegated to the unconscious by the proper young white intellectual, but it was part of the scene nevertheless. As was the black world from which it sprang, however misperceived and dimly understood.

Time, place and scene as well as *dramatis personae* continued to shift and change as the years passed. But here I am speaking of the formative years, the years when basic commitments are made, goals are set, and the first intellectual progeny are being generated and taking shape. Essentially they are the years when one is being acted upon rather than acting, being shaped rather than shaping. And overwhelmingly, the shaping took place for me in the South and largely by southern forces, either positive or negative. But it was a South of a particular time, the South of the early 1930s.

What was the South like half a century ago? That is a legitimate, a rather typical, historical question. It could have been asked in 1885, or for that matter in 1785, as well as in 1985. Historians have dutifully squared away with the documentary evidence to answer such questions of earlier periods. I once addressed the question about the 1880s, a half-century later. But here I am speaking not as a historian but as a surviving witness from the period itself. My testimony, therefore, is subject to discount for possessing all the notorious shortcomings of fallible memory and impressionistic evidence. It does claim such merits as a firsthand witness possesses, dubious as they are.

To read about conditions is one thing, to confront them firsthand another. One could read all about the Great Depression at the time and did so daily—the failures, foreclosures, bankruptcies and shutdowns; the soaring unemployment, the breadlines, the homeless, the hungry, the army of transients, the Hooverville shanty towns, the Dust Bowl. But what did cotton at 4.6 cents a pound and sugar at 3 cents and 25 percent unemployment actually mean in human terms to the millions most affected? One way to find out, a way rarely taken by the college bred, was to go and see.

Maury Maverick was one who tried. “I decided to go out and find what it was all about,” he wrote. The flamboyant Texas congressman may not have been a man for all seasons, but he was a man for that season. He tells us:

I struck out for a real hobo trip. I slept in jungles, got lousy, and what was worse, got preached and lectured at by four-flushing racketeers who called themselves preachers. . . . I saw enough to make anyone sick for a long time. I saw one mother and father sleeping on wet ground, with a baby in between, wrapped in sacks. There was promiscuity, filth, degradation. In some jungles there would be as many as a hundred people in one group. Men and families slept in jails, hot railroad urinals, cellars, dugouts, tumble-down shacks.

That was in the winter of 1932. My most comparable experience came in 1935, a summer job with a New Deal relief agency surveying rural poverty in Georgia. It took me in a car I bought for thirty dollars into the remote backcountry, into Liberty County, Coffee County, Carroll County, to places the news cameras never penetrated, over roads not made for cars. It took me daily into shack after shack and cabin after cabin with my stupid questionnaire forms, face-to-face with people in conditions that made a mockery of my prescribed questions and em-

barrassed me for asking them. It was clear that all the misery and hunger and despair had not taken to the road and hobo jungles. Many lacked the strength or the means or the hope ever to leave the entrapment of their rural slums.

The next year, the summer of 1936, James Agee and his collaborator of the camera, Walker Evans, came South. Their sample was in Alabama, as Maverick's had been in Texas and Louisiana and mine in Georgia. They lived with three Alabama families of croppers and tenants, and theirs was a far more intensive experience. Agee was just a year my junior, and it is one of my regrets that I never got to meet him. I saw all that he saw, but it was Agee and Evans who brought it all home to me later in the pit of my stomach by means of their book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Evans caught their lives with pictures, Agee with words: "shaken with fevers, grieved and made sick with foods, wrung out in work to lassitude in the strong sun and to lack of hope or caring; in ignorance of all cause, all being, all conduct, hope of help or cure, saturated in harm and habit." And on the rare occasions when Agee used their own words he did so with a fine ear: "How did we get caught? Why is it things always seem to go against us? Why is it there can't ever be any pleasure in living? I'm so tired it don't seem like I ever could get rest enough. . . . Sometimes it seems like there wouldn't never be no end to it, nor even a let-up."

Then in 1937—though the pictures were taken in 1935 and 1936—appeared *You Have Seen Their Faces*, the writing by Erskine Caldwell and the camera work by Margaret Bourke-White. The photography was more consciously dramatic and contrived than that of Walker Evans, and Caldwell was the reporter rather than the poet of poverty that Agee was. Her pictures, however, leave no doubt that Bourke-White was in her way capable of portraying the depletion, the defeat and the humiliation, along with the shame, the bitterness and the despair of those Alabama faces. Nor did their underlying decency, kindness and pathetic humility entirely escape her lenses. Here and in Evans' work and Agee's words is an authentic record of human betrayal in the South of a half-century ago.

It was natural that attention should have been focused on rural people of the South, since in 1930 more than two of every three southerners were rural, 67.9 percent in fact. And 42.8 percent of the region's labor force still worked on farms. Of the industrial work force a large percentage was classified rural, and the majority was less than one generation removed from the farm. Textiles employed more workers than any other single southern industry. Cotton mills were concentrated

along what was, with unconscious irony, called the "Golden Crescent," running along the foothills of the Appalachians in a great curve from north Georgia up through the Carolinas. Chapel Hill was well located as a window on the land of the "lintheads." Back and forth from there to Atlanta in the thirties the prethroughway roads took me directly along the so-called Golden Crescent, where cotton mills and lintheads were rarely out of sight.

The cotton mill workers, like the workers in other industries, had been the most widely advertised industrial asset of the developing South for fifty years. The New South boosters of the eighties had billed the region's inexhaustible and underemployed labor supply as the most tractable, easily pleased, contented, industrious and readily available in the whole country. Moreover, they were "of purest Anglo-Saxon stock" and natively averse to unions and strikes. "In the booster rhetoric," as George Tindall put it, "the patient docility of the Saxon churl became almost indistinguishable from that attributed to the African."

Just before the onset of the depression, however, the fabled linthead docility suddenly ended with an outburst of strikes, several involving violence. The Golden Crescent was a tinderbox of grievances needing only a spark. The workday was ten to eleven hours long, wages of ten dollars a week were common, living conditions in mill towns were degrading beyond belief, and state labor laws were a century behind the British factory acts. In 1929 a storm of turbulence swept the cotton mills. Strikes were often unorganized and mutinous. Communist-led unions moved into Gastonia, North Carolina, and were met by state militia and mob violence. The labor movement was brutally crushed and the unions left a shambles. When southern labor stirred next in the 1930s, however, it came to life with the heritage of 1929 militancy supporting it and found sympathy in some universities. At Chapel Hill, mill-hand delegations got to know student sympathizers and supporters. By that means the wretchedness of the lintheads became a personal encounter for me about the same time that I encountered the sharecroppers.

The large black component of the southern scene and the plight of its people at the time seemed to the southern white youth less of a discovery than the white sharecroppers and mill hands. I had grown up with black people all around, and since they were always there I shared to some extent the common illusion that I was already familiar with them and their problems. What I *was* thoroughly familiar with was one side of the universally prevailing system of racial subordination—the white side and white attitudes. Had my experience been entirely normal, as a twenty-five-year-old youth from Arkansas and Georgia, I would never

have known any person of color other than servants and laborers and a few professionals who differed little from them in their demeanor. I would never have had any cause for wonder at the little signs, *White Only* and *Colored*, that appeared everywhere and no reason to question why I had never had a fellow student who was not identifiably white. By 1934, however, this particular youth from the Deep South had already been given reasons to wonder and question, reasons that will be explored later.

These were some of the darker and more forbidding parts of the scene in the early thirties. There were, to be sure, brighter aspects. Among them were the first years of the New Deal and the hopes that it aroused, even though it disappointed many of those hopes later. Still, for a time—for the first time in a long time—one could feel he had a few friends in Washington, friends who might not be very effective but who were doing their best, or seemed to be. Another source of cheer was a growing awareness of the presence of men and women of courage, intelligence and good will in the South, people who were not blind to the crueler realities of their time and land. They tended to reach out for the like-minded and I soon knew a good many of them. Few were able or willing to speak out. Those who did seemed to me to speak in too mild a voice. The thing was that they lived under powerful inhibitions. These sprang from two sources, one within the South and one originating outside the region.

The inner source had been there a long time, at least since Reconstruction. David Potter was referring to it when he spoke of the "siege mentality" of the South, Howard Odum when he wrote of "a state of mind" that is "manifest in war time," and W. J. Cash in what he called the "savage ideal." It was not a sign or a consequence of unity, but rather of regimentation. Its objective was not so much consensus as conformity. Its methods were not those of persuasion but those of coercion—coercion of the sort that produced the most extreme form of what Tocqueville meant by the "tyranny of public opinion" in America. The coercion took many forms. In its more savage form it resorted to the rope, the lash and the torch of the mob and the Klan, but it tapered off in milder types of the charivari—or what southerners called "shivaree"—to hold deviants up to public shame. Those antique and cruder methods were increasingly less necessary as the fundamentalist clergy and the white man's party developed their powerful instruments of regimentation and conformity. Cash summed up the results as well as anyone. "Criticism, analysis, detachment," he wrote, "all those activities and attitudes so necessary to the healthy development of any civilization, every one of

them took on the aspect of high and aggravated treason." To doubt or to question the status quo and the received wisdom in any degree was to affront if not insult one's fellow citizens and call in question one's very loyalty.

The outside source of this regimented conformity was an outside as perceived and distorted from the inside, but there can be no doubt of its powerful and conspicuous existence. It took the form of a revival of muckraking, this time confined largely to the Northeast and directed exclusively at the benighted South—the confederacy of rednecks, fundamentalists, demagogues, kluxers, lynchers, boobs and degenerates. Combining a literature of exposure with one of satire and ridicule, South-baiting became a northern journalistic industry with fabulously rich resources to mine below the Potomac. Among favored subjects were lynching, peonage, chain gangs, convict labor, child labor, mill towns, sharecropping, corrupt courts and politics, illiteracy, laziness, poverty, bigotry, hookworm, pellagra.

All these evils existed, of course, however often denied or minimized. But what outraged the besieged beyond endurance was the contempt, the jeering and the ridicule that often accompanied their exposure. The supreme master of ridicule was H. L. Mencken, and it did not help that his headquarters were below the Mason and Dixon line in Baltimore. None of his many imitators could match the master. The South, he declared, was the "bunghole of the United States, a cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodism, snake-charmers, phoney real-estate operations, and syphilitic evangelists." Mencken probably reached his peak in the late 1920s, as did the South-baiting industry in general. But its influence and productivity persisted into the 1930s and spread through the academy, especially among the social scientists. Investigators of southern atrocities and monstrosities poured through from the North.

Even if a southerner mustered the courage to overcome the inner restraints of the siege mentality and its coercions, there remained the chorus of jeers and taunts from extramural sources to contend with. The siege mentality resulted in part, at least, from being besieged. To make common cause with the Yankee South-baiters in order to attack the brutalities and stupidities of the intramural police was to raise troubling inner doubts about one's own deeper loyalties. Those eager allies from outside did not invariably harbor the most disinterested of motives. If to embrace them and their missions were to endorse and align oneself with their self-righteousness and venomous sneers, this would surely not cast one in the most congenial company. Yankee scorn of the South was an old story, but added to scorn was now ridicule and contempt. It was

one thing for the college boy to rush for the most recent issue of the *American Mercury* to be the first to quote Mencken's latest quip about "the miasmatic jungles" of darkest Arkansas. It was quite another for a budding scholar from that state to place himself on the outset of his career beyond the tolerance or even the endurance of his native region. Other allies and another environment were indicated.

Chapel Hill then enjoyed the reputation of being an oasis in the Sahara of the Bozart. By 1934, however, the depression had dried up or slowed down the flow of its wellsprings. Money was tight, and administrators were increasingly cautious in the face of a critical legislature and a suspicious public. Even in its heyday Chapel Hill had never dared seriously to challenge prevailing southern racial proscriptions and orthodoxies. There were, of course, no black students or faculty and no acknowledgment of their ethnic interests and regional contributions in the curriculum. A few radical white students, largely of New York or metropolitan origin, were tolerated and made their presence felt. And the university commitment to freedom of speech was strong enough to protect most, though not all, of the usual assortment of visiting spokesmen for causes and ideas.

The foundation of Chapel Hill's reputation for freedom and innovation, however, lay in the arts, the performing and writing arts, and especially playwriting and staging. Paul Green was then in his prime as a prize-winning playwright. The shadow of Thomas Wolfe lingered about, and the novelist himself turned up for a visit. William T. Couch, still in his early thirties, presided over the University of North Carolina Press, which was then the most active and influential publishing house in the South. He hospitably entertained a stream of writers and aspiring authors, many of whom I met at his home.

On the fringes of this activity existed a small community of provincial bohemians, or would-be bohemians, partly but not wholly outsiders and regarded askance by insiders. Not long after I arrived on the scene I was called into the office of Howard Odum, to whom I owed my fellowship at the university, and confronted with the question of how it was I could have managed to be there only three weeks and already to have fallen in with the "wrong crowd." The hangout of the wrong crowd was Abernethy's Book Store, just across Franklin Street from the main campus. It was there that the manifestos were composed and the new books thumbed through before sale, and it was there that *Contempo*, a now long-extinct periodical of advanced views, was edited. Since that publication was probably the only thing Gertrude Stein knew about Chapel Hill when she came to speak at the university, it was to

the bookshop she headed when she arrived. I happened to be temporarily in charge of the till when she walked in and was struck quite speechless with the wonder of it all. Despite professorial admonition, my attachment to the wrong crowd persisted.

Chapel Hill was a sort of intellectual crossroads of the South in those years. Roads led in and out and crisscrossed. There was a Chapel Hill–Atlanta–New South liberal axis, and a much dimmer Chapel Hill–New York–Union Square radical axis. Meanwhile a Nashville–Baton Rouge–Old South Agrarian axis was shaping up, taking form eventually in the *Southern Review*. Between those axes ran the embattled road from Chapel Hill to Nashville that was alleged—with exaggeration—to be bristling with hostilities and practically impassable: Vanderbilt Agrarians versus Tar Heel liberals.

Personal encounters between the two camps were rare, but in 1936 there occurred a dramatic confrontation in the form of a debate at Nashville. Accompanying W. T. Couch, who defended the Chapel Hill cause singlehandedly, I was an apprehensive witness to the event. Couch had his hands full, since the front row was filled with Agrarians, authors of *I'll Take My Stand*, and several of them joined in the attack. Voices and tempers rose to a high pitch, and the exchange ended suddenly with the dramatic withdrawal of the Agrarians led by Allen Tate. They filed from the front row up the center aisle and out the door, with Tate shouting final imprecations. At a bar later I fell into conversation with an unidentified man who turned out to be Andrew Lytle, the novelist. He insisted that we continue our talk and drinks at an informal gathering where he was sure I would be most welcome. The gathering proved to be that of the Agrarians, who were celebrating their triumph over poor Couch. Some embarrassment followed my identification as a friend of the foe, but good manners prevailed and despite some awkwardness the door was opened to some relationships of lasting importance and meaning to me.

Presiding over the traffic at North Carolina in the 1930s was the benign spirit of Frank Graham. For the first of my three years at the university I occupied a rented room in a house directly behind President Graham's official residence on Franklin Street. This made casual personal encounters natural and not infrequent and helped turn an attitude of respect into one of affection. The man was all but irresistible. It is impossible here to assess or so much as suggest his significance for the South of that time, but it is necessary to mention one of Frank Graham's contributions. That was to serve, however cautiously and reluctantly, first as intermediary and eventually, when he became president of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in

1938, as avuncular sponsor for the left wing of southern New Dealers.

All things considered—including the alternatives among more celebrated universities—Chapel Hill was not a bad place for a young southerner in his mid-twenties to be in the mid-1930s. Especially one who was facing so many crossroads of his own life and career at that particular time. How could I reconcile being a southerner with so many impulses then considered antisouthern? Convictions and loyalties collided constantly. Underlying tensions had to be worked out—tensions between the modern and the traditional, the cosmopolitan and the provincial, between radical and conservative, rebellion and compromise. One might harbor both literary and scholarly impulses, and my immediate circle, both at Chapel Hill and at Emory, shared more of the former than the latter. I had friends who were Agrarians and friends who were Marxists. Some were even liberals, a term not yet opprobrious. How was one to come to terms with all these incongruities?

Whatever the extracurricular experience at Chapel Hill contributed to sorting out, resolving, or complicating these problems—and it undoubtedly did contribute—that contribution was largely unanticipated. It seemed at the time incidental to the declared purpose of earning scholarly credentials. Yet the ostensible purpose was incidental to undeclared expediencies. The fact was that the commitment to degree-earning was prompted by a prior commitment to finishing a book begun the year before my arrival at the university and with no thought of becoming a professional historian. After a year of research and the writing of some four chapters of a biography of Tom Watson, I had run out of money. The best hope of completing the book seemed to lie in getting a fellowship for graduate work in history and offering the book as a dissertation. And the logical university for the purpose seemed to be North Carolina, since its library held the voluminous private papers of the man whose biography I was writing.

The matter of the needed stipend had already been attended to by Howard W. Odum, who happened in the summer of 1934 to be paying a visit to his parents, a mile down the road toward Covington from my parents' home in Oxford, Georgia. Informed of my purpose in calling on him, he took me immediately to the barn where he was weaning a calf and instructed me pointedly on the procedure while hearing about my lofty intellectual aspirations. It was a thoroughly Odumesque performance—down-to-earth. My case for the stipend was undoubtedly furthered by a word from Odum's protégé and colleague in sociology at North Carolina, Rupert B. Vance. That connection came of another parental coincidence: his parents had been neighbors of mine in Mor-

rilton, Arkansas, and I had worked for his father there one summer as a hired hand.

The Odum-Vance team headed the most thriving academic empire in the South at that time. Odum's close links with the private foundations and his cautious diplomacy tided his enterprise over the shoals of depression and floated his school of regional sociology handsomely. The two men, but especially Vance, were initially my closest personal ties at the university. But their field was sociology, and I had tried that discipline for two full and shattering days as a graduate student at Columbia in 1931 before transferring to political science in desperation to acquire an M.A. Anyway, my writing commitment in 1934, though begun independent of previous brushes with the academy and with no academic purpose in mind, pointed irrevocably to history. In that department I therefore registered, endowed as I was with nothing but the faintest formal preparation on the American side. One dull term's course as an undergraduate at Emory University (in which I sat beside David Potter) had been more than enough to discourage further curiosity.

With a fresh if empty mind and an exciting book of my own under-way, I reasoned that perhaps I would now see this unexplored field take on a new glamor and I would rise to the challenge. Much better minds had done so. After all, I was nearly four years older since my first brush with the subject and far riper in wisdom—or so I thought. The first thing to do, I was told, was to master the standard “sets”—the old *American Nation* series, the *Yale Chronicles*, and others guaranteed to bring one up-to-date. Noting with some puzzlement that most of the many volumes were already a generation old, I nevertheless plunged in. That first plunge was chilling. Plodding through volume after volume, I began to wonder if I had ever encountered prose so pedestrian, pages so dull, chapters so devoid of ideas, whole volumes so wrongheaded or so lacking in point. Was there anything memorable about what one was expected to remember? Was this the best my newly chosen profession could do? Was it what I would be expected to do? A career, a lifetime dedicated to inflicting such reading on innocent youth? Or accepting it as a model for myself? Fleeing the stacks repeatedly, I spent much of that first year pacing Franklin Street by night, debating whether I might fare better as a fruit-peddler, panhandler or hack-writer.

A few rays of hope eventually broke through. A seminar in second-century Roman history served as a reminder that history could be absorbing and that Gibbon had written some of it. A few intensive encounters with American documents in pursuit of a thesis stirred the sporting blood and the spirit of the hunt. Research evidently could be

fun. The gradual discovery of works on American history of genuine merit, as well as the discovery of a few kindred spirits who shared the dilemmas of apprenticeship, inspired hope. Perhaps it might be possible, after all, to make one's peace and find satisfaction in the strange guild to which by coincidence I found myself joined.

Hardest of all to accept was the predominant literature, the scholarship and the prevailing interpretations in my own field of southern history. I mean by "my own," the field into which I was inescapably thrust by coincidence, by chance, but primarily by prior commitment to a dissertation subject. However fascinating it might be, Roman history would never do as a major field for a candidate who insisted upon presenting to the faculty his study of a provincial popular leader of the nineteenth-century South. A southern historian I must be—or somehow become—whatever my growing antipathy to the work of my predecessors in the field.

To explain so strong an aversion to the existing corpus of historical scholarship to which I proposed to contribute, it would not be enough to give a detached appraisal of southern historiography. At the risk of some unfairness and distortion, it would be more to the point to view it through the eyes of the young novice concerned, whatever his limitations and biases. To me at the time each of the masters held up as models for emulation seemed virtually of one mind, united not so much in their view of the past as in their dedication to the present order, the system founded on the ruins of Reconstruction called the New South. That system, already in its sixth decade, still had two more decades to go (as it turned out). It faced the future with pride and confidence and an unstinting faith in its founders and their precepts. This faith and pride seemed as fully shared by historians of the antebellum South as by those of more recent periods. In many and varied ways the histories they wrote joined in vindicating, justifying, rationalizing and often celebrating the present order. Sharing neither their faith nor their pride in that order, I naturally questioned their histories. Both the critic and the criticized, be it admitted, were responding primarily to the present rather than to the past.

The "present" for me, the intellectual present in which I came of age, was the peak and crest of the Southern Literary Renaissance. No southern youth of any sensitivity could help being excited by the explosion of creativity taking place during the early 1930s—in fiction, in poetry, in drama. Nor could I help seeing that the novelists, poets and playwrights were in the main writing about the same South historians were writing about and making the whole world of letters at home and

abroad read what they wrote and ring with their praise. With this awareness and the expectations it aroused, I arrived as a young apprentice at the doors of the history guild for training—and what a striking contrast, what a letdown, what a falling-off! No renaissance here, no surge of innovation and creativity, no rebirth of energy, no compelling new vision. This was a craft devoted primarily at the time, or so it seemed to me, to summing up, confirming, illustrating, and consolidating the received wisdom, the regional consensus that prevailed uniquely in the South of the 1930s and—though I could not then have known it—was to continue through the 1940s. That consensus proclaimed the enduring and fundamentally unbroken unity, solidarity and continuity of southern history.

The most celebrated southern historian of the time was Ulrich B. Phillips of Yale, foremost authority on the history of slavery and the plantation. As perceived from Carolina, he seemed to embody New South more than Old South values, to preach the continuity of New South with Old, to see the old order as anticipating and preparing the way for the new. Not only was slavery a school for civilizing Africans, but the plantation was an efficient training camp for future captains of industry. The planters' efficiency and skills in labor management were models for the industrializing of the New South, and their example proved the necessity for white supremacy.

Over the history of the Confederacy and the Civil War loomed the towering reputation of Douglas Southall Freeman, whose four-volume *R. E. Lee* appeared in 1934. In that work and volumes that followed, Freeman not only glorified a flawless hero for the postwar South, but justified the Lost Cause as well. W. B. Hesseltine, in *Confederate Leaders in the New South*, was to draw the moral later that "one by one, the Southern states were 'redeemed' by their old leaders," that it was by his "full acceptance of the new social order" that "Lee became the embodiment of the spirit of the New South," determined "to build a new society on a Northern model." The new order, therefore, not only had the blessings of the old, it was continuous with it and led by Old South leaders.

Reconstruction history had no presiding genius of the stature of Phillips or Freeman. Loosely attributed to the Dunning school, the prevailing and all but universally received interpretation preceded Dunning and was more the product of a regional white consensus than of a school or a scholar. The authority of the academy stood behind the consensus, however, and scholars contributed abundantly to it. Aspiring revisionists were warned by E. Merton Coulter, for example, against any "departure from the well-known facts." The well-known facts constituted

the perfect justification for the discrediting of Reconstruction, its overthrow by almost any means required, its replacement by the Redeemers and the legitimizing of their regime. A few scholars had questioned the orthodox picture—R. H. Woody and Frances B. Simkins in a study of South Carolina and W. E. B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction*, for example—but they had little effect. In the academy and out, in North as well as South, was stamped the tragic image of a betrayed, savaged and humiliated people and a South degraded beyond endurance by the corrupt rule of carpetbaggers, blacks and scalawags. Rarely has history served a regime better by discrediting so thoroughly the old order from which the new rulers seized power.

The history of the New South regime itself, after the seizure of power, was first written by enthusiastic proponents and advocates of the New South crusade, or lifted directly from their promotional literature and indistinguishable from it. Philip Alexander Bruce of Virginia led off with a huge volume entitled *The Rise of the New South* (1905), which told how the southern states had “risen from the dust of absolute ruin” to a “greater prosperity” than that of the antebellum order. By their “courage and wisdom” they had made this “the most honorable period in their history,” “one of the noblest chapters in the annals of our country,” one that would be “unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled in the record of any other part of the Union.” One secret of success by the ruling elements of “intelligence and property” was their program of disfranchisement that had struck a blow at “the principle of manhood suffrage . . . a blow that ultimately will completely destroy it.” The new laws, he said, “will eliminate with equal effectiveness the least intelligent and the least conservative elements among the white and black voters alike.”

When academic historians got around to the period, their contributions modified the rhetoric of approbation only slightly. Holland Thompson, the first of them, in *The New South* (1919) faithfully echoed the tone of cheerful optimism, confidence and pride in the triumphs and prospects of the new order. A more interesting example of academic New South history was a learned monograph from Johns Hopkins, Broadus Mitchell's *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (1921). Although he called himself a Marxist and once ran for office on the Socialist ticket, Mitchell grew up in South Carolina and Virginia with a father to whom the son confesses he owed his point of view, that of the New South gospel. He undertook, he says, “not only an industrial chronicle, but a romance, a drama as well.” The romance was that of southern industrialization, led in its initial stages by the old planter aristocrats in a New South that received from the Old South the heritage of “an in-

grained and living social morality"—noblesse oblige, paternalism, philanthropy and all—more continuity of the Phillipsian school.

One minor challenge of historians to the New South consensus deserves mention, that of Benjamin B. Kendrick and Alex M. Arnett, *The South Looks at Its Past* (1935). They dared question the part of the doctrine that stressed white unity, continuity and sectional reconciliation by pointing to evidence of sharp conflict not only intersectional but intrasectional as well. Another challenge came in the form of a polemical tract from Texas, W. P. Webb's *Divided We Stand* (1937). These dissents, however, were completely overshadowed by the arrival of support for the New South interpretation from Harvard in a celebrated 1937 book by Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900*. A history of reconciliation between North and South, Buck's study enriched our understanding of the problems and rituals of reunion. Since he regarded the restoration of "a sense of nationality . . . based upon consciousness of national strength and unity" as the noblest achievement of the period, however, he tended to applaud whatever contributed to that end. The New South gospel of reconciliation appealed to him strongly. Granted certain imperfections in the system, he wrote, those with "a more realistic conception of conditions in the South took a more cheerful attitude." Perhaps the imperfections, especially when one considered "the easy and even indolent adaptation of the mass of Negroes," were a small price to pay for peace and reunion. After all, the Radicals were "only the sickest of the nerve-shot age," and the Negro had by now "discarded the foggy notions of Reconstruction."

Such were my despairing perceptions of the received wisdom about the South's past that prevailed around 1937—and was to prevail for some years to come, on through the next decade. These impressions were admittedly crude and immature at the time. And yet, thinking back from a much later and presumably more mature perspective, I confess that I find in those youthful impressions much that still holds up. A consensus did prevail among historians in the 1930s, a uniquely broad consensus that papered over the breaks and fissures and conflicts in southern history with myths of solidarity and continuity. Only with the support of such a consensus could a writer like Wilbur J. Cash have undertaken a book about "the mind" of the whole region from past to present and gained wide acclaim and credence for his efforts.

Any challenge of revision to such a broadly based consensus would be a formidable, perhaps foolhardy undertaking, especially if it started with a rejection of most of the underlying assumptions on which the consensus was based. But then, youth is the time for foolhardy ventures.